

# SAVING the GRANGE

Local resident is hoping to boost membership and interest in historic building

By DANIELLE FROST  
Post-Record staff

**S**hannon Nickelsen has fond memories of visiting the local grange as a young child. Her grandmother, Ora Reude, was the junior grange leader in the Cape Horn area, just outside Washougal.

"It was a part of our life," she said. "We used to put on flag ceremonies and candlelight ceremonies. On Sundays, we would have ham dinners at the grange. Grandma taught us how to set and wait tables, and we would get tips. It was so rewarding."

But as Nickelsen got older, she became more involved with the local 4-H club and began a part-time job, and the grange went on the back burner. However, she continued her membership until it closed in 1998.

But in an interesting twist of fate, Nickelsen is now working to preserve the very things she enjoyed so much as a child. She is hoping to revitalize the Fern Prairie Grange, which has been inactive since 2008.

Nickelsen, who lives just down the road from the building, began her renewed interest in the grange a few months ago, when she was looking for a place to host her 25th wedding anniversary party.

"I kept thinking, 'What about the local grange hall?'" Nickelsen said. "Someone put me in touch with Janice Anderson (a grange member) who told me that the building was closed, but volunteered to show it to me."

For Nickelsen, who says she is a very spiritual person, it was a "ah ha" moment.

"The minute Janice put the key in my hand, I thought, 'Oh Lord, what is this? I felt instantly that if he is with me on this, we will succeed and it will be a blessing to the community. That's how symbolic it was to me. It's a blessing, and it's too good to let it go.'"

So, Nickelsen began researching the issue, and contacted the Washington State Grange organization. She learned that the charter would have to be reorganized and a local president selected. So, that's what she did. The group now has 19 members and has organized two work parties. Nickelsen is the president.

"At the first one, there were only four people," she said. "Last time, 11 people showed up. We tripled our volunteers."

She has high hopes for the future as well.

"In five years, I want this place to be known, and for people to use it," Nickelsen said. "I want

See Grange, page B4



Shannon Nickelsen has dedicated countless hours during the past six months to revitalizing the Fern Prairie Grange. "It's a place for Americans to gather together and unite," she said.



A display case full of achievement awards, Clark County Fair ribbons and other memorabilia is located inside the Fern Prairie Grange.

Continued from page B1

it to be used for town hall meetings and for farmers to be recognized for their gifts to this nation. It's also a place for families, a happy place where people get to know each other."

The Fern Prairie Grange has been in existence since 1928. According to the Washington State Grange Association, it is America's oldest farm-based fraternal organization. It is a nonpartisan, grass roots advocacy group for rural citizens with both legislative programs and community activities such as talent and craft contests, scholarships, youth programs and camps and more.

Established in Washington, D.C., in 1867, the National Grange consists of 3,878 local granges in 37 states with more than 300,000 members.

"This isn't just about farmers," Nickelsen said. "It's about Americans uniting for common goals, and standing together. It's a place for families, a happy place to gather."

She wants to share the fond memories of her youth with the next generation.

"I really feel my grandmother in all the stuff I'm doing," Nickelsen said. "It's kind of a legacy. I want to do all those things that were so meaningful in my youth with my grandchildren."

To learn more about the Fern Prairie Grange or about membership, contact Nickelsen at 834-6732 or Anderson at 835-8206.

## MEMORIES FROM GRANGE SCRAPBOOKS...

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— Shannon Nickelsen on her memories of the Cape Horn Grange



In 1978, the Fern Prairie Grange members came out dressed to the nines as they celebrated the organization's 50th anniversary (above and at right). The women included music, food and recognition of Grange members throughout the years.

